



# Before Now

*Norah Olson*

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A harrowing and heartbreaking teen romance expertly told with a reverse timeline, *Before Now* is another emotionally charged novel from suspense author Norah Olson about a young couple who runs headlong into tragedy while trying to escape their complicated pasts.

The odds were against them, but somehow aspiring astronomer Atty and her troubled boyfriend, Cole, managed to escape their old lives in the rough neighborhoods of Minneapolis and the judgmental eyes of their parents, who couldn't see that Atty and Cole were meant to be. But they don't get away clean. Eventually the mistakes and betrayals from their pasts catch up to them. Atty is lying about why Cole is being hounded by the cops and Cole won't go quietly to jail—or anywhere without Atty. Then the unthinkable becomes reality and the future is instantly unwritten.

Through Atty's journal, all the intimate details of her tragic romance with Cole unfold from finish to start, including the mystery of what brought them together—and tore them apart.

## Before Now Details

Date : Published December 26th 2017 by Katherine Tegen Books

ISBN : 9780062347077

Author : Norah Olson

Format : Hardcover 208 pages

Genre : Contemporary, Young Adult, Romance, Young Adult Contemporary

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## **From Reader Review Before Now for online ebook**

### **Nickie says**

Before Now by Norah Olson starts out with a double suicide attempt where only the boy dies and then goes backwards from there so we see why Atty and Cole make the choices they did. I liked the characters, but the time shifts were hard to follow and jarring. I kept having to ask myself... where are we now?

I wanted to be invested in the story, but found I just didn't care all that much. There were some really intense scenes, but because of the backward motion characters died and I didn't know or care about them until after they were dead and then I had no reason to invest my emotions in them and their story.

I liked the concept of telling the story back to front, but the execution didn't work in my mind.

I didn't like it and because of drug use and some sex it is not suitable for below HS.

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### **Rhi Campbell says**

I received an ARC from Harper Collins in exchange for an honest review.

Actual rating: 2.5/5.

This story is told in reverse, which is both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, it probably kept me reading purely because I was vaguely curious to get to the events the MC referenced, but on the other hand, it felt somewhat like trying to join a conversation halfway through. In places, I had to go back a few pages because a new character had been mentioned suddenly and I thought I must have missed their introduction. That said, that is due to the reverse timeline, so I suppose there's no other way around that.

However, the whole story just seemed to keep a steady pace - I wasn't desperate to find out what events set the whole chain in motion, and it was only idle curiosity that kept me reading. It's less than 200 pages, but I still took a day to read it, when I would have devoured it in a few hours if it had me hooked.

Overall, an interesting premise and format, but needs work to develop the sense of intrigue that should keep you reading a book set out like this, as well as the characters, who I still felt I didn't really know by the end.

In some places, it felt like the author tried to throw in every teen issue she could think of - drugs, racism, relationships, not seeing eye to eye with parents, grades, sex and sexual assault, running away etc. - and she spread herself too thin and didn't execute any of the individual storylines as well as she could have. There was no depth or emotion.

On top of that, the ending being the beginning left me feeling unsatisfied, as it didn't feel like everything had been tied up, and I felt like I'd missed the big turning point that made these teens go on the run. However, Olson's writing is smooth and flowing - with better execution of the storyline and more depth/emotion, this could make a great novella.

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## **rachel says**

Trigger warnings for suicide, sexual assault (including implied child molestation), substance abuse, parental neglect, and racism.

- I loved the reverse plotline. It was confusing in the beginning but definitely grew on me. A unique way to tell the story.
  - Decent characters. I just didn't love them all that much.
  - Olson rushed over a lot of the sensitive topics she touched upon. I needed more emotion and depth in her portrayal of suicide. I also wish more attention had been focused on the sexual assault component.
  - I did like that she tackled an interracial romance without glossing over the microaggressions and stigma which still exists today.
  - Olson's writing was lyrical but also... well, didn't do it for me (for whatever reason).
  - The ending was unsatisfying.
  - Idk. It was just not something that didn't grab me about this story. Somewhat forgettable.
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## **Zoë Danielle says**

One of the more unusual books I've read this year is definitely *Before Now* by Norah Olson, which is a Memento-style young adult novel about a Romeo and Juliet romance told in reverse. The issue is that stakes don't seem really high and instead of the main characters, Atty and Cole, just seem overly dramatic. I think part of that has to do with them being teenagers, which might be realistic, but part of it has to do with the fact that the book is so short (just over 200 pages) so there's not a lot of development or depth to the plot.

Besides the reverse storytelling, which I loved in premise but meant that the book tended to get less interesting as it went on, the other unique aspect of *Before Now* is the electronic dance music (EDM) component, since I am not familiar with that scene and I have never seen it represented in a young adult novel before. There are also some nice descriptions by Olson, but my connection to the story and to Atty and Cole was lacking because they didn't have a chance to develop a real relationship in so few pages. While *Before Now* didn't blow me away, it was fun to try out the reverse story-telling and I'd love to read more books like that in the future. Let me know if you have a recommendation!

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## **Annie (Diverse Reads) says**

- Atty (mc) is Haitian-American.
- Atty's father is Haitian.
- Cole's mother is queer and has a substance addiction.
- Rita (sc) is a lesbian.

Trigger warnings for suicide, sexual assault, neglect, and racism.

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### **Alice-Elizabeth (marriedtobooks) says**

I was kindly sent a physical arc for review by the publishers!

Lots of T/W: Abuse, Racism, Drugs, Suicide etc...

Before Now was such a quick story, told in reverse with the ending starting things off and finishing with the earliest memory of the two main characters. Although I liked the premise and the main character Atty's love for astronomy and EDM music, the writing style just didn't work for me. I struggled to connect with Atty and Cole as characters. It was just not my cup of tea, having more questions than answers by the time the story was over. At various stages, I was very close to DNF'ing but decided to finish as it was short in length and wanted to catch up on reviews.

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### **Alyssa Gil says**

I was pretty apprehensive going into this book because of its very low average rating. I didn't read any reviews, but honestly, anything below about a 3.5-star average rating makes me a little nervous. However, I often have unpopular opinions about books, so I tried to forget about the rating and go in with an open mind. And honestly, as I read the first chapter, I kept thinking, "why don't people like this book?" I thought the first chapter was very well-written and captivating. I started to think that maybe this would be one of those books I loved that everyone else hated. But, unfortunately, the promising start went downhill pretty quickly, and by the end I completely see why this has such a low rating.

My main issue with this book is a lack of plot, and the way the story is told. I was interested to read another book with a reverse timeline after reading (and loving) E. Lockhart's *Genuine Fraud*. I believe that that book made good use of the reverse timeline; it still managed to create suspense and make you want to keep turning the pages. That technique completely failed in this book. There was no suspense, no surprises, nothing that shocked me whatsoever. There are no big reveals, no twists, absolutely nothing that makes the reverse timeline make sense. It worked in *Genuine Fraud* because it had a purpose. It didn't work in this book because it feels like a pointless gimmick; it adds nothing to the (almost non-existent) plot. It's just literally a story told in reverse, and honestly, I think it would have read better in chronological order.

I also found myself increasingly annoyed with the characters, particularly the main character, Atty. I tried to keep an open mind, because I don't think that characters need to be likeable; in fact, some of the best characters are unlikeable. But Atty was just plain annoying. If you like tons of unnecessary exclamation points in your books, maybe you'll enjoy Atty as a narrator. Otherwise, be prepared to feel like you're reading the inner monologue of a wide-eyed child who thinks that everything! warrants! lots! of! exclamation! points!

I'm not giving this one star because I didn't HATE it. There were moments I really enjoyed, moments that were written well and that invoked emotion in me. But overall it felt completely flat. I really don't understand what the point of this book is, if there's supposed to be one. It didn't teach me anything or make me feel much of anything other than annoyed.

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## **Jennifer says**

Before Now is a standalone Young Adult novel.

The narrator is 17 year old Atabei/ Atty (girl). The story is told in 1st person POV. Atty lives in Minneapolis. Her dad is Haitian. Her boyfriend is Cole, who is white.

The book features a reverse timeline.

The book starts by discussing a very serious subject. The problem to me is that we do not know these characters. We should feel something. But unfortunately I did not feel much. The two main characters did grow on me a bit by the end. But while the idea of a reverse timeline was interesting ... it really did not work for me like I think it was meant to.

There are actually a lot of serious topics that are mentioned in this book. However they are mostly mentioned without going into detail. We find something out like it was mentioned before. But since the story is told from the end to the beginning by the time we see the scenario play out ... well we already knew about it so it just doesn't have the impact it should. Plus most of the chapters are so short. There were very few scenes that played out to my satisfaction.

The first chapter was quite interesting. However because of the reverse timeline we never get to revisit what happened.

The book was super short. The idea of a reverse timeline was interesting. I actually liked the middle and end of the book more than the beginning. Although I did find myself sometimes forgetting that it was in reverse order. So it was a bit confusing at times.

I did like Atty and her friend Lisette. I liked Cole's friend Rita. I thought that the stuff with Daniel was interesting and quite relevant right now.

The book ends when Atty and Cole met. But it was sort of an abrupt ending to me. Overall, this book was just okay for me.

Thanks to edelweiss and Katherine Tegen Books for allowing me to read this book.

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## **Bella says**

Reading a book where the plot is reversed and knowing the ending first is a new concept to me. Will I, or

would I, read another like it? Very possibly.

\*Trigger warning for Suicide and Indicated Rape in this book\*

Knowing the ending and then reading the book in reverse was hard, at first, to get used to. It felt like it could be some sort of hard let down to be hit smack first with this powerful “ending” and then be lead first into the beginning of how everything started in the first place. I felt fairly good about this one when it came to its completion.

Looking back on the book it was a very Romeo & Juliet plot line. Whether that was intentioned or not, I don't know. I, actually, despise R&J due to high school English but if retellings are done right I actually enjoy them due to the drama of it. I enjoyed this one.

As I read further and though the plot was backwards you could still get attached to Atty and Cole because you were still being built up in their lives. It didn't matter who did what and when. You were still immersed in their lives, their friends, their families.

A big plot point would happen and instead of having that build up in a normal book story line where your thought goes “I saw that coming”, you would have to go back over the previous days to find out WHY that happened. The big plot point would just BAM ?! Upper cut you in the chin and you'd want to know who did it or why said person did it or how it happened. So in this reverse time line it made incidents a little more.. intriguing? But also gut wrenching if you know what I'm talking about in various scenery.

I have the book a 4/5 because I wish there had been a chapter or two more added on to Cole and Atty's Suicide attempt at the beginning of the book. He, obviously, doesn't make it but she lives. Very Romeo & Juliet as stated before. But the 4/5 is because I REALLY wanted to know did she try to die again? Did someone else make this “book” from her journal as a piece of memory from her death? Where was her mother? She wasn't in those “last” beginning scenes. Those “beginning” chapters left a lot of questions.

Besides the questions rolling around in my brain, I enjoyed this one. It's a short book. 208 pages. I read it in three days due to being a slower reader but even then that's fast for me. It's a good contemporary to add to your list if you enjoy real life drama types.

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## **alice (arctic books) says**

You can find this review and others at [arctic books](#)

I'm very impressed by this novel. My emotions started from disbelief and shock to some of understanding and deep sadness over the course of these few months during which this novel spans. I was highly doubtful as to how this backwards chronological journal writing style was going to tell the story, but Olson does it surprisingly well.

These 200-some pages of this novel don't yield much for me to say, rather gives me a lot to think about. I urge you to pick up this novel and grasp the drastic change of emotion that Olson captures in BEFORE NOW.

Trigger warnings for abuse, suicide, implied rape

Thank you to Harper for providing me with this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Sarah says**

(I received an advance copy of this book for free. Thanks to HarperCollins and Edelweiss.)

This was a contemporary story, told in a reverse timeline from the end to the beginning.

Atty was quite a passionate character, and she felt things really deeply. I did feel sorry for her because she wasn't allowed to be with Cole, and the situation she found herself in wasn't really her fault.

The storyline in this started from the end, with a semi-successful suicide attempt between Atty and Cole. The rest of the story then went backwards from this point, one day before another, and explained how Atty and Cole met, and what led them to the decision to commit suicide together. I found this reverse timeline quite confusing though, and although I wanted to know what had happened, I still felt like the story would have been better with a normal forwards timeline.

The ending to this wasn't as shocking as the beginning, which was a bit of a let-down, and I almost felt like reading the book again from the back to the front.

6.5 out of 10

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### **Tessa Yitu says**

This book should come with a big trigger warning at the beginning because I know some people might find it disturbing.

So this book is almost like an experiment you know first "the end" and then "the beginning" it didn't work for me like that, I promise I tried to read it but I couldn't so I started at the end and I followed the time line.

Is always interesting read a book that is writing almost like a diary, but that also can be a bad thing since you don't get to know more the characters. I have to confess I didn't like any character, but it's not something that I hated and made me throw away the book.

Is almost like "love at first sight" kind of story, but also something that I felt more like: they fell in love because they were lonely. It felt all rushed, and maybe that's why it was hard to believe or get the time to like the characters. They are teens and not saying that immature, but they need help, they need someone to talk with, and having parents that are there but not really, of course made hard for them to talk with people. It's a fast read, again not something you will hate, but something that will make you feel weird.

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## Adrienne says

A tragedy told from the present... to the past.

Others really liked the reversed timeline; I found it quite disorienting. It was really disruptive to my reading. Maybe it would work well for the movie - if this would be turned into one - but for the book... nah.

Also - I get that this was a journal, but... Atty's style of writing was too simple. Maybe even childish. A bit uninspired - even when she was gushing over Cole. It made me lose focus in the story a few times.

The last chapter of the book (which was the beginning of the story) was also a **huge** let-down. I expected an adorable *meet-cute* that would have provided a stark contrast to the end of their story, and made the entire tragedy heavier and more painful but... ah, well...

Still, I consider Atty and Cole's story to be a sad modern-day crossover between Bonnie and Clyde, and Romeo and Juliet - made even more depressing by the fact that 'Juliet' failed her suicide attempt.

"We did not make it to Mexico. We did not leave this Earth together.

I was nowhere, but alive and alone."

Ay-ay-ay. Tsk.

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## Vanessa says

I don't even know where to start with this mess...

I thought I'd give this book a try because it was short and I was super into the idea of a reverse timeline. This book did not feel short. And the reverse timeline while interesting really killed this book for me.

We're now going into spoiler territory. Yeah. I can't even talk about this book without everything being a spoiler...

Trigger warnings (which I never use but given how this book deals with these subjects...) for suicide, rape, molestation, abuse, drugs, etc.

(view spoiler)

TL;DR

Don't pick up this book if you actually care about things. Certainly do not give it to any teen or anyone who is/has been suicidal, dealt with abuse (relationships or drug), or been raped/molested.

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## Hollis says

BEFORE NOW is a story with an interesting concept. Instead of a fluctuating timeline that jumps around from past to present and so on, the story begins with the end and then rewinds slowly day by day. The problem that came from that choice is that the beginning (the end) is.. drama. And dramatic. And feels very exaggerated with the vague mentions of things that have happened to send these two teens on the run. What makes this harder to handle is the fact that I couldn't connect to the characters because all they were was reactions to events I didn't understand because of things I didn't yet know.

Olson's leads did sorta grow on me by the end (beginning) but it was almost too little too late. Even though a lot is happening, there's also just a small scope to this story, and the situations that could have held weight and meaning were instead glossed over. It was snippets in time, tiny scenes, instead of something you're meant to immerse yourself into.

I think this would've worked out really well if the plot had been something other than it was but luckily I did enjoy the author's writing so it wasn't a complete miss for me.

\*\* I received an ARC from Edelweiss and the publisher (thank you!) in exchange for an honest review. \*\*

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